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PROGRAM All Things Considered

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BOB EDWARDS: There was more argument today on Capitol Hill over President Reagan's request for an additional \$14 million for the Nicaraguan Contras, or anti-Sandinista rebels. Groups on both sides of the issue also held news conferences to promote their positions, in what is becoming an increasingly acrimonious debate.

We have two stories on today's developments. First, here's NPR's Bill Buzenberg.

BILL BUZENBERG: Opponents of renewed aid to the Contras have charged that the \$14 million is just the first step toward increased American support for the rebels. Today the political leader of the largest Contra force, Adolfo Calero of the FDN, seemed to confirm that charge. Speaking before a gathering of Administration supporters, Calero said his organization needs considerably more money to double the size of rebel forces and to turn the war in their favor.

ADOLFO CALERO: We estimate in the vicinity of 30 to 50 million dollars would permit us to increase our troops by 20,000 men, would keep us going for the time until we are able to provoke this turning point.

BUZENBERG: The need for more money and men is spelled out in a classified report to Congress made public today by the New York Times. For the first time, according to the document, the Administration is telling Congress it wants to expand rebel forces, from 15,000 up to 35,000 men. The document also says that direct American military force has been ruled out for now. But given American stakes in the region, it warns, "This course must realistically be considered as an eventual option if other

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policy alternatives fail."

When asked about the classified document today, National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane said whether or not the rebels expand their force is up to the people of Nicaragua, not the United States.

On the matter of more money, McFarlane said once Congress expresses itself on the \$14 million, its position will have to be sustained in successive votes involving more money. But just how much, he couldn't predict.

And on the eventual option of using U.S. troops, McFarlane gave this answer:

ROBERT MCFARLANE: It seems clear that for as long as the freedom movement grows and support for the Sandinista government declines, which we assert is the case, that it is within the power of those people locally in Nicaragua to solve this problem. And indeed those same people are saying, "We do not need American military help. And time after time, our President has said that the United States must not intervene militarily in Central America, nor is that our intention. And so reports to the contrary are simply unfounded.

BUZENBERG: That kind of response was criticized today by two Democratic senators who released a study by the liberal Institute for Policy Studies. The report, called "In Contempt of Congress," includes 77 instances where, its authors say, the Reagan Administration has engaged in deceit, distortion, or duplicity on Central America.

Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa said the New York Times story on the classified document is a case in point.

SENATOR TOM HARKIN: There again, what they have been saying out in the open and what they're saying in their classified documents are two different things. What they're saying in their classified documents is, "Look, if the Contras can't succeed in overthrowing the Sandinista government, then, given our stakes, then direct application of U.S. military force must realistically be recognized as an eventual option."

BUZENBERG: Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, a Vietnam veteran, said Central America is different than Vietnam, but the instances of deception are much the same.

SENATOR JOHN KERRY: This report traces a pattern of how we are involving ourselves, of how we are misleading the Congress, of how we are misstating to the American people our goals.

And if you look back at the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,

if you look back at the Cambodian invasion, if you look back at the history of body counts and the history of misinterpretation, of the history of Vietnam itself, and look at how we are interpreting the struggle in Central America and examine it against the CIA involvement, against the mining of the harbors in Nicaragua, against the spending of funds, against the concerted effort to try to fund the Contras, there is an absolute and direct and unavoidable parallelism between those two periods of our history.

BUZENBERG: Both Senators Kerry and Harkin oppose renewed aid for the Contras.

Such opposition can be dangerous to American national security, according to former U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, who spoke on ABC's Good Morning America.

JEANE KIRKPATRICK: You know, it's not Vietnam that's the appropriate analogy. It's Munich. And unfortunately, what the opponents of the Administration are doing is creating a situation in which what they fear may come to pass -- namely, a situation that really threatens the United States and creates war in our own hemisphere.

BUZENBERG: Senator Harkin later took strong issue with Mrs. Kirkpatrick's comments, with its suggestion of appeasement at Munich.

SENATOR KERRY: What we are seeing coming from this Administration and from the spokespeople for this Administration is nothing more or less than international McCarthyism.

BUZENBERG: The debate is getting rougher.

COKIE ROBERTS: It was a kind of day when nothing and no one seemed sacred. And it was a lesson the Catholic Archbishop of Washington, James Hickey, learned the hard way. He appeared before a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee to present the U.S. Bishops' stand on Nicaragua, the first public statement by the Catholic bishops since a visit to the country last month. The Archbishop came out strongly against any aid to the anti-government forces, then was asked by the committee's chairman about President Reagan's statement yesterday that the Pope supported the Administration's plan. Archbishop Hickey replied:

ARCHBISHOP JAMES HICKEY: Mr. Chairman, I was present with the other religious leaders when President Reagan made that statement. I have no way of commenting on it directly. I feel it inappropriate to read particular applications into what is clearly a very general statement.

ROBERTS: Arizona Republican Congressman John McCain

disagreed with the Bishop about his interpretation of the Pope's remarks, and then went on to chastise Hickey for his refusal to support the people fighting the Sandinista government, in the face of the Sandinista's repression of the Catholic Church. The Archbishop did not defend the government, but stuck to his position.

ARCHBISHOP HICKEY: It has not worked to put a gun to their head. We have simply intensified and given -- the restrictions and given excuse for the introduction of very severe restrictions in that country.

REP. JOHN MCCAIN: Archbishop, I would say [unintelligible] you've enunciated what former Ambassador Kirkpatrick so aptly described as the "Blame America Firsters."

ROBERTS: In answer to a question about how the church is doing in Nicaragua, the Archbishop said it's faring fairly well, because faith seems to grow in the face of persecution.

That led to a stream of sarcasm from Illinois Republican Henry Hyde, who scolded the Archbishop by telling him what a Nicaraguan bishop had reported.

REP. HENRY HYDE: Seventeen of his priests have been expelled, 17 of them. And half of the priests there are foreigners. And so what you do to strengthen the church, in its persecution, is you keep expelling the priests, and then you cut down the clergy by half. Then you push the people's church and you get the education of these young kids into liberation theology, which you're much more familiar with than I am, but you understand Father Gutierrez and all the rest and how Marxist analysis can work with Christ.

ROBERTS: The rhetoric around the question of aid to the Nicaraguan rebels reflects deeply felt attitudes on the issue. The Speaker of the House repeated today his assertion that the Contras are butchers and maimers, not freedom fighters. And once again the Speaker said the President would not be happy until American troops go to Nicaragua.

The Speaker's forces are making a check today to see if the Democrats are still opposed to aid to the Contras. So far, it seems they are. If the vote looks strong, the Democratic leadership's inclined to bring up the question of aid as a straight up-or-down vote on the floor of the House next week and get a chance to defeat Ronald Reagan. Republicans worry that's just what will happen, and they've been looking for some sort of compromise that will allow the President to save face.

Today the Assistant Secretary of State was asked at a

congressional hearing if the Administration would make a move toward compromise before the vote next week.

Assistant Secretary Langhorne Motley:

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE LANGHORNE MOTLEY: What I haven't seen is any type of concrete coming forward. It's always, "Are you ready?" I think the President has made a very good offer. I haven't seen anything come [unintelligible]. I think that the Administration, on a variety of issues, keeps an open mind.

But as I said, it's been 217 days [unintelligible] appropriated for this fiscal year. Well, you have to kind of get on with it.

ROBERTS: At this point, the Administration's plan looks like it's going to have a tough time in the Senate and lose in the House, unless Democrats decide they have to have some sort of positive Central American policy to vote for. Then they'll propose an alternative to the President's plan next week. Otherwise, the Democrats might simply savor a rare victory and come out with their own plans for Nicaragua when it's time to consider the foreign aid bill later this month.